

Reading I: Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever."

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

"The right hand of the LORD has struck with power; the right hand of the LORD is exalted. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD."

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1-4

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

The word of the Lord.

Gospel

+A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 20:1-9

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Easter

The story of the birth of Jesus is in the midst of life. Cattle, donkeys and sheep are part of the picture. Mary and Joseph are there. Shepherds and Magi journey to the crèche and leave praising God and telling all they meet about the wonder they have witnessed. They arrive to witness a chorus of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest." Their voices join in the chorus. This vision of the birth of Jesus is filled with special effects. What can we expect for the scene of Jesus' resurrection?

What we expect is at odds with what we see and hear in today's gospel. There are no witnesses to the event. All the witnesses, Mary, Peter, the Beloved Disciple and we today, discover is an empty tomb. This is something that we would expect in a crime drama or horror movie, not the resurrection of Jesus. We have learned in science class that nature abhors a vacuum. We have a difficult time with emptiness. Empty stomachs, empty nests, empty hearts and empty homes can be painful. We want fullness not emptiness. Yet, there may be more in emptiness than we first perceive.

Mary witnessed the empty tomb in fear and horror. She ran off to cry, "They've stolen his body!" Peter, our first and presumably infallible pope was characteristically clueless. He was unable to make sense of what he saw, "Who would take a dead body?" Only the beloved disciple made a connection. He saw and believed. Was this pure faith alone or more trust in Jesus' promise? We can never know. We may be close to our beloved even in being distant from them. Even in death, people can know the presence of a beloved in their feelings and thoughts.

In any event there were no witnesses at all as to what happened or how Jesus rose from the dead. I have always wondered about the contrast between the nativity and resurrection scenes. One would think that the birth of the Kingdom of God would have a bit more fanfare. What can the empty tomb teach us? What does it say about the glory of God? Perhaps it takes more effort to see it or perhaps it's closer than we expect.

A few weeks ago, I defined the difference between a diet and a fast. With a diet we always crave what we know we shouldn't have; more food to fill our growling bellies. With a fast, our bellies growl too, but we find God's presence in God's gift of hunger. This may sound a bit odd, but we may perceive the wonder of God in all our experiences. We think that when we fast, we offer something to God. In reality God offers to us the ability to fast and the gift of knowing God to be near in our emptiness.

After more than a year of social distance or, put another way, the lack of social contact, we can feel alone. Feeling alone can lead to loneliness and isolation. I have felt that way, in this last year, from time to time. We can also have a sense of solitude. The difference, like with fasting,

between loneliness and solitude is the discovery of God's presence. One can be alone with God. That can be what fills the sense of aloneness. Solitude is God's gift and a pillar that has supported me so far.

Perhaps the Beloved Disciple knew the power of God as he witnessed the emptiness of Jesus' tomb. He believed in the gift of God's presence no matter what life offered. Nearness to Jesus had nothing to do with physical proximity. It had to do with memory and thought. Jesus was always near him even with, and perhaps through, his witness of Jesus' death on the cross. The only version of the crucifixion of Jesus to have believing witnesses near the cross is today's one, the gospel of John. Traditionally, the Beloved Disciple is John the Divine, son of Zebedee and the author of this gospel.

The three different responses to the empty tomb were no hindrance to these three witnesses. It was their faith in the Risen Jesus that has led to our faith in Jesus. Peter died a martyr's death in Rome after a life of witness. In a following passage in the gospel of John, Mary would recognize Jesus near her as he spoke her name. John would write his gospel and die in exile on the isle of Patmos. Only Mary's story is recorded in Scripture. Peter's and John's experiences are part of Tradition. All three are saints in heaven. We know these things because we believe; all by God's grace and in God's time.

No one has seen the resurrection of Jesus. Believers experience the Risen Lord Jesus in other ways. They can glimpse it when two or more gather in Jesus name, in the breaking of bread, in the sudden flash of insight into a problem, in holding a baby or in the emptiness of our hearts. God can enter, unbidden, into our thoughts at moments we don't expect. I have known for years that when my mind wanders, God can be speaking. All I have to do is listen. All I have to do is ask, "Lord, why have you brought this to my attention? Why is this more important than what I had been doing?" Perhaps the Beloved Disciple knew this too. He saw emptiness and believed.

This is the briefest reflection I have written in a while. I hope that God has helped me listen well.

May you know the Risen Jesus when you need him the most. May we all know that Christ is risen; truly he is risen.

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April 3-4, 2021